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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KABUL 000260

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [ASEC](#) [MARR](#) [AF](#) [IR](#)

SUBJECT: KARZAI TELLS SENATOR BROWNBACK IRAN SHOULD IMPROVE
RELATIONS WITH U.S.

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Classified By: DCM Richard B. Norland for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

SUMMARY

1. (C) During a January 8 meeting with Senator Brownback, President Karzai was critical of Iranian policy toward the U.S. He reported on his recent meeting with the Iranian Foreign Minister where he called on Iran to improve relations with the U.S. He argued that normalized U.S.-Iran relations were not only important for Afghanistan and the region, but in Iran's national interests. Without relations with the U.S., Iran would never become a regional power. Karzai argued that Iran could also help in Iraq. Karzai's top priorities for Congressional funding were assistance with terrorism originating in Pakistan and dealing with poppy. Karzai lamented that few Arab countries were assisting Afghanistan, while they were regularly "hob-knobbing" with Pakistan. END SUMMARY

Iran

2. (C) During a January 8 meeting with Senator Brownback, President Karzai briefed on his recent meeting with the Iranian Foreign Minister. Karzai said that he had "never seen a more mistaken government policy" than Iran's foreign policy toward the U.S. Iran was handicapping itself and the entire region by not engaging with the U.S. Karzai believed that Iran could also be helpful in dealing with radicals in the region. He described Iran as an "Iranian radical state", not a country that was promoting global Islamic extremism. Iran had only its national interests in mind. During his meeting with the Iranian Foreign Minister, Karzai said that not once was Islam mentioned; he repeated that Iran only talked about its national interests. Karzai provided some

historical background on the connection between Islam and Iran, explaining that Islam acquired its culture from Iran which gave the religion its script, structure, and poetry. The Iranians curse the Arabs for radicalizing Islam, Karzai said.

¶3. (C) Karzai reported that he told the Iranian Foreign Minister that Iran was shooting itself in the foot by snubbing the U.S. against Iran's own national interests. Karzai contrasted Afghanistan's relations with Iran with those with Pakistan. Pakistan was an ally in name, but an enemy in fact. If Iran were friendly to the U.S., it would settle a lot of problems in the region, argued President Karzai. He believed the Iranian people were friendly toward the U.S. and that Iranian culture and society were closer to those in the U.S. than to Arab countries.

¶4. (C) In response to a question from Senator Brownback on how best to deal with the Iranian nuclear question, Karzai stated that engagement was important, but it needed a reciprocal response from Iran. He described the GOI as feeling vulnerable and threatened and therefore understood the potential benefits of good relations with the U.S. The problem, Karzai continued, was that Iran did not know how to break the "environment of hostility that has engulfed them regarding the U.S." Karzai firmly believed that Iran wanted good relations with the U.S. The President of Iran and the mullahs would like to be able to have better relations with the U.S. if they could, asserted Karzai. Iran wants to be a regional power and has the resources to do so, so what is holding it back, Karzai asked. It was the absence of relations with the U.S., he said. Iran needed a venue to get out of its current predicament and should be encouraged to talk to the U.S. He said he gave the Iranian President a clear message: for the sake of Afghanistan and the region, Iran and the U.S. need to have better relations. Karzai

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noted, however, that Iran did not feel the U.S. wanted to open up to it. The Iranians question why Pakistan can have nuclear weapons while the Iranians are being denied. Karzai argued that if Iran were more friendly to the U.S., the U.S. might even help it develop nuclear technology. Iran knew well it was imperative to have good relations with the U.S., Karzai repeated.

¶5. (C) Senator Brownback explained that the U.S. was entering a new era of engagement with the region. He stressed that a new engagement doctrine was needed, as the U.S. was now fighting a movement, not individual nations. Karzai interjected that we were not really fighting a movement, but rather individuals. In line with this new engagement, Senator Brownback asked Karzai if the U.S. should open negotiations or talks with Iran, to which Karzai responded with an unequivocal "yes". The Senator pointed out that Iran continues to be a supporter of terrorism, so it was not easy to seek better relations. He pointed to public pronouncements coming out of Iran and asked how the U.S. could negotiate with Iran when the country was starting from such a hostile position. Karzai agreed that there was not an immediate solution to Iran.

¶6. (C) Karzai continued, however, that he was very blunt with Iran on relations with the U.S. He believes that Iran understands the value of engagement and is suffering due to the absence of relations with the U.S. Karzai cautioned Iran that it was dead wrong if it thought it could take on the U.S. in Iraq or Afghanistan. During a recent meeting in Tehran, the Iranians told Karzai that they could hurt the U.S. in Afghanistan, but Karzai told them they were wrong.

Iraq

¶7. (C) Turning to Iraq, Senator Brownback stated that the U.S. had 18 months to bring about change in Iraq,

particularly in making progress to reduce the daily death toll of U.S. soldiers. Karzai responded that if secular violence was now rooted in Iraq, there was nothing anyone could do to stop it. Karzai saw two solutions. Get Iran to help in Iraq or bring the Saudis and Syrians together to exert influence there. Turkey also needed to play a role in the Kurdish areas.

Afghan Priorities for Congressional Funding

¶8. (C) Senator Brownback asked Karzai what he saw as his top priorities for Congressional funding. Karzai answered that Afghanistan was a success story for the U.S. and that the Afghan people backed the U.S. presence totally, even those families who had members killed by coalition forces or ISAF.

Karzai saw problems in two key areas. First, terrorism originating in Pakistan had to be dealt with. "No doubt about it, even in some cases with official sanction from the Pakistan government", Karzai asserted. The second challenge was poppy, which went hand in hand with terrorism. Afghanistan needed resources to build a state and the strengthened ability to engage and contain Pakistan to bring them around to a cooperative attitude. He described Pakistan as "not walking the talk", so the Pakistani mindset had to be changed. Karzai explained that the major reason for the establishment and existence of Pakistan was Islam, for the Muslims who were living in India. The problem, Karzai continued, was that the Islamicization of the Pashtuns went too far. Fundamentalists became extremists who turned into terrorists. 9/11 was one of the unintended consequences of this process. The Pakistanis need to know that Islamic radicalism will not make them strong or keep their country together. Karzai saw this as the biggest challenge for the U.S. -) keeping Pakistan moderate and on the path to reform.

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To him, Peshawar and Quetta were the epicenters of Islamic radicalism and the Taliban was their weapon.
War on Terror) No Help from Arab Countries

¶9. (C) Karzai declared that the U.S. had won the war on terror. "You have dismantled them and they are on the run", he said. The task now was to make sure that America's allies were not letting extremists take over in places like Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. Karzai said that Jordan was our best ally in the Arab world. He noted that Afghanistan received almost no help from Arab countries. "Something is going on as to why they don't engage with Afghanistan", he said and pointed out that the Arab countries regularly "hob-knobbed" with Pakistan. Saudi Arabia was "hands off" when it came to Afghanistan, while Egypt was not here at all, he lamented. On Russia, Karzai said Putin was not engaged and the Russians "do nothing positive here".

¶10. (U) Senator Brownback did not have an opportunity to clear this cable before departure.

NEUMANN